

# Bisphosphonates

## Information for patients and families

St. Michael's  
Inspired Care.  
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Bisphosphonates are a group of medicines used to treat osteoporosis.

You may be prescribed one of these bisphosphonates:

- Alendronate [Fosamax<sup>®</sup> or Fosavance<sup>®</sup> (with vitamin D)]
- Risedronate (Actonel<sup>®</sup> or Actonel DR<sup>®</sup>)
- Zoledronic acid (Aclasta<sup>®</sup>)

### **Why is a bisphosphonate prescribed for me?**

Bisphosphonates decrease the risk of fractures (broken bones) by up to 40%.

Bisphosphonates work by slowing down the breakdown of bone.

### **How do I know the medicine is working?**

You will not see or feel the effect of the medicine directly. The doctor will check your bone density using a scan every 1 to 3 years to see if the medicine is working. It is important to keep taking your medicine regularly to get the full benefit.

## How do I take alendronate or risedronate tablets?

Follow the instructions below when taking your medicine. If you take it incorrectly, the medicine may not work properly or may cause ulcers in your esophagus (the tube from your mouth to your stomach).

1. Take your tablet on an empty stomach in the morning just after you get out of bed.
2. Do not eat anything for at least one hour.  
**Exception:** Actonel DR<sup>®</sup> should be taken **with** food.
3. Do not take any other medicine, including vitamins or supplements, for at least one hour.
4. Swallow the tablet whole with 1 to 2 full (8 ounce) glasses of plain water. Do not take with any other fluid except plain water.
5. Do not lie down for at least 1 hour after taking the tablet.

Follow your doctor's instructions on how often to take this medicine. This may be once a week or once a month. Use a calendar or an alarm to remind yourself to take your medicine.

## What if I miss a dose?

If you miss a dose of your medicine, take it the next morning.

If you are on a weekly schedule and forget for an entire week or more, never take a double dose on the same day. Skip the dose you missed.

If you are on a monthly schedule and forget for 3 weeks or more, skip the dose you missed.

## **How do I get zoledronic acid?**

Zoledronic acid is given by intravenous (IV) infusion usually once a year. Some patients get it every 18 to 24 months. You can get this infusion through the osteoporosis clinic at Michael's Hospital 61 Queen St E, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor or at an outside location. Your doctor needs to check your blood test results before each infusion.

Your infusion appointment will take about 1 hour. Follow these instructions:

- You must get the medicine at a pharmacy before your appointment. Bring it with you on the day of your infusion.
- 1 hour before your infusion, drink 2 full glasses of water (16 oz).
- After your infusion, drink 2 full glasses of water. Drinking water before and after the infusion helps lower the chance of side effects, like headache or kidney problems.

If you miss an infusion appointment that was scheduled at St. Michael's Hospital, contact the nurse at 416-864-6060, extension 8181 to re-schedule.

## **What side effects are possible?**

If you are taking alendronate or risedronate by mouth, you may have an upset stomach, diarrhea, nausea, or stomach pains. There is a small risk of ulcers in your esophagus (the tube from your mouth to your stomach).

Tell your doctor right away if:

- You notice problems swallowing
- You have severe stomach pain
- You have heartburn that is getting worse

If you are getting zoledronic acid by IV infusion, you may feel muscle aches, bone pain, headache, fever and chills for the first few days after your first infusion. You can take over-the-counter pain medicine like acetaminophen (Tylenol®) if you need to.

There is a very small risk that zoledronic acid can lead to kidney damage. **If you notice very dark urine (pee) or low amounts of urine, tell your doctor right away.**

There are two other very rare, but potentially serious, side effects.

- 1. Osteonecrosis of the jaw.** This is a breakdown of the jaw bone, usually after a tooth is removed or other dental surgery. The chance of having this is very low (less than 1 in 10,000).
- 2. Atypical femur fractures.** This is a fracture in your thigh bone. This is a risk if you have been taking this medicine for more than 5 years. If you feel new pain in the groin or thigh for more than a few weeks, do not put weight on the affected leg and let your doctor know right away. The chance of having this is very low (16-115 per 100 000 people with more than 4 years of use).

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This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Ask your healthcare provider about this information if you have questions.